

Week of January 27, 2003: MaineDOT Flash Facts

Topic: Older Driver Issues

Facts:

Nearly 100,000 Maine licensed Maine drivers are aged 70 and over.

Studies show drivers have fewer crashes as they gain experience with age...up to a point. However, the crash rate starts to increase as people reach their seventies.

Studies of Maine crashes show the estimated crash rate at age 78 is more than double that of drivers aged 65. Drivers in their early eighties have about triple the crash rate of a 65 year old.

From 1999-2001, over 13,000 Maine drivers aged 70 and older were involved in 12,300 crashes. These crashes resulted in 106 fatalities and over 6,000 injuries. (The 106 fatalities are about 20% of the total Maine crash fatalities.)

Monday:

If you are a driver over 70, compare yourself today to when you were younger. All of these items are important if you are going to be a safe driver.

1. Vision (Clear vision, peripheral vision, night vision and ability to adjust to sudden changes in light.) (Glaucoma also hinders the ability to read signs.)
2. Adequate physical flexibility (Decreased flexibility makes it harder to turn and look back; it could also affect your ability to steer and brake).
3. Medications (Can affect both mental and physical abilities. Talk to your physician or pharmacist about your prescriptions and driving).
4. Reaction time (Everyone's reflexes become slower as they age.)
5. Decision-making (Can become more difficult.)
5. Past or current medical conditions (May affect your driving ability.)
6. Ability to judge speed (Diminishes with age.)
7. Multi-processing (Judging distance and speed becomes increasingly difficult with age.)

Protect yourself and others by knowing your limitations and not taking chances on the road.

Wednesday:

Drivers aged 70 and older are most at risk in the following situations:

- Intersections-Older drivers are involved in crashes nearly twice as often as other drivers. [20% of all Maine crashes happen at intersections, but for drivers over 70, that number nearly doubles (36%)].
- Following too close. (Rear end crashes involving the older drivers are 25% higher than the statewide average).
- Yielding the right of way
- Turning (especially left turns) (Older drivers have difficulty judging speed and distance.)

- Lane changing
- Passing
- Using highway ramps (Older drivers have difficulty turning their heads to look over their shoulder, due to arthritis.)

Be especially careful in these situations if you are an older driver.

Friday:

Earlier this week we talked about the increased risk factors for older drivers. Today we want to provide tips older drivers can use to keep themselves and others safe on our roads.

Driving is a complicated task. If you are not mentally or physically up to it, you can be a threat to yourself and others on the road.

Warning signs that your driving skills may be slipping:

- Increase in near misses and even crashes (including minor bumps that never used to happen).
- Getting lost (even in familiar areas).
- Cars or pedestrians seeming to appear out of nowhere.
- Getting confused or uncomfortable at busy intersections.
- Difficulty with eyes adjusting to headlights.
- Difficulty reading signs.

Some tips for the older drivers (many of these apply to all ages as well)

- Do not drive when you are under stress.
- Leave plenty of room between you and the car ahead.
- Travel streets you are familiar and comfortable with.
- Allow time for your eyes to adjust from light to dark conditions.
- Drive when you are rested.
- Avoid distractions when driving.
- Plan ahead and travel when weather and light conditions are good.
- Avoid busy times of the day.
- Arrange for other transportation when in doubt.

Driving privileges are so important in today's society, but your safety is even more vital. If you have concerns about your driving skills, consult with your physician and your family.